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SUBJECT: PRT SALAH AD DIN: IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN TUZ

Classified By: PRT Team Leader Richard Bell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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(U) This is a PRT Salah ad Din reporting cable.

¶1. (S) Summary: Iranian influence in the Salah ad Din (SaD) district of Tuz Khormatu derives from the district's high proportion of Shi'a Turcoman residents, its relative proximity to Iran and its position as a north-south and east-west crossroads. Coalition Forces (CF) believe the district to be a transit sector for Iranian weapons and a rest-and-refit area for extremists. Shi'a political parties are active in Tuz, including Sadrists, ISCI, and the Prime Minister's Da'wa party; ISCI in particular is seen by Kurds and Sunni Arabs as a conduit for Iranian influence. Concern about Iran shared by Kurds and Sunni Arabs in Tuz could form the basis of some cross-ethnic political cooperation. End summary.

Tuz Demographics

¶2. (C) Tuz Khormatu is a mixed district in SaD province, to the east of the Hamrin "mountain" range, bounded to the north by Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah and to the southeast by Diyala; the latter two provinces border Iran. The best estimates put the Kurdish population at roughly one quarter of the district, with the balance evenly divided between Turcomans and Sunni Arabs. Although the exact proportion is unclear, Shia Turcomans outnumber their Sunni counterparts.. The district sits astride the road between Baghdad and Kirkuk, and it also serves as a transit point for east-west traffic, including weapons, commercial goods, and individuals from Iran. Tuz is not so much an area where attacks take place, as a district where extremists go to rest and refit, and through which they transport weapons. However, some attacks do occur there, mostly against Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and civilian Iraqi officials.

Iranian Weapons Trafficking

¶3. (S) CF intelligence reporting indicates that Tuz is a transit corridor for weapons from Iran coming in through Diyala, and then through Tuz to other areas. This trafficking is generally connected to fuel smuggling. One RKG (a sophisticated anti-tank grenade) probably of Iranian origin was found in a recent cache, and there was an attack last fall on a US convoy that also involved a RKG. Last spring CF lost a soldier to an Explosively Formed Projectile (EFP) which is also believed to have come from Iran. CF's No. 1 target in Tuz is a purported Special Groups leader, but he does not seem to spend very much time in Tuz -- reports are that he spends most of his time in Iraq in Baghdad or Karbala.

Shi'a Politics in Tuz

¶4. (S) ISCI is viewed by many Kurds and Sunni Arabs as a primary conduit for Iranian influence in the Tuz area. The

most prominent component of ISCI in Tuz is the Badr Organization -- the heir to the former paramilitary wing of ISCI, the Badr Brigades. Qahtan Taher Qadir (strictly protect), the KDP Assayish chief in Tuz, has alleged that two Iraqi Police officers, Capt. Falah Hassan Mustafa and Col. Ahmed Ali Hassan, are examples of unqualified individuals who returned from exile in Iran and received lucrative government positions solely due to their connections to ISCI and Iran.

15. (S) Sadrism presence in Tuz continues but limited detail is available about specific linkages with Iran. Fawzi Akram Samin Tarzi, a Sadrism COR member, while listed in the embassy roster as representing Suleimaniyya governorate, is originally from Tuz and is seen by locals as a Tuz resident. He has also been linked in some CF reporting to Special Groups activities. However, two police chiefs in the QGroups activities. However, two police chiefs in the district have reported to the PRT representative in Tuz that Mr. Fawzi receives special treatment from the Ministry of Interior (MoI) in the form of extra Iraqi Police drawn from Tuz to protect him in Baghdad. While the Sadrist seem to have only limited appeal among Turcoman Shi'a in Tuz, the Tuz PRT representative has seen Sadrism paraphernalia including posters for the ostensibly peaceful Sadrism social organization, the Mumahidoon.

16. (C) As in Shi'a areas throughout Iraq, PM Maliki appears to be making significant inroads with the electorate. KDP sources told the PRT that the Prime Minister's Rule of Law list is likely to be the top Shi'a recipient of votes in the area and third overall. Signs featuring Rule of Law candidates are commonly seen in Tuz city while ISCI and Sadrism posters are rare, at best. The rise of Maliki can be

BAGHDAD 00000172 002 OF 002

seen as a sign of popular dissatisfaction with Iran, since Shi'a voters generally give the PM credit for taking a relatively independent stance toward Tehran.

Kurds and Iranians

17. (C) Many of the PRT's Kurdish and Sunni Arab contacts in Tuz have complained about Iranian influence, and the local PRT representative has received reports that two district council members have close Iranian connections. Not all of these complaints are directed toward the Shi'a: one of the council members mentioned is a Shi'a Turcoman affiliated with ISCI/Badr but the other is a Kurd currently with the PUK. KDP leaders in Tuz sounded like downright Iraqi nationalists when they complained to the PRT about Iranian influence locally and within the national government. Sunni Arabs in Tuz have expressed the usual suspicions regarding Iranian and Shi'a domination of Iraqi politics to both CF and the local PRT representative.

Comment

18. (S/NF) Iran's actual influence in Tuz is limited by widespread suspicions of Iranians from all elements of society, including the Shi'a. Nevertheless, strong fears of Iranian domination provide a rare point of agreement across ethnic lines, particularly between Kurds and Sunni Arabs. A UNAMI source confided to the PRT that senior Kurdish leaders have already accepted that Tuz will almost certainly not become part of Kirkuk Province (or the KRG). While local Kurds have not yet acquiesced to this, the anti-Iranian sentiment they share with the Sunni Arabs may provide a basis of political cooperation if they remain in predominantly Sunni Arab SaD province. End comment.
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